

Orthodox Christology: A Critique

Robert Von Schrlitz, the author of the book *The Incarnate Christ: An Engineer's Quest to Define the Person of Christ*, critiques orthodox Christology.

What is wrong with orthodox Christology? What is wrong with the two-nature theory of the incarnate Christ? For some, the answer is nothing. It is a great solution the way it is. It only needs to be presented and defended. But for others – like me – orthodox Christology has serious problems. In this article, I will discuss seven troubling issues related to orthodox Christology. Some of the issues I discuss are related to the theory proper, while others relate to the attitude of some that hold this position. These issues are not pointing a finger at someone out there. They are actually pointing to someone nearby, that is, myself. Each issue represents a position or attitude that I have had in the past. They relate to what I believed and how I behaved. In other words, this discussion is personal, uncomfortably personal. This discussion gives a window into my journey from what I believed to what I currently believe about the person of Christ, from a two-nature theory to a one-nature theory. I share these thoughts with a set purpose – to inspire the reader to think critically about his or her own position, and, if led by the Spirit, to make corrective changes for the better.

A Bad Start

Lost Context (did not value the Jewish faith)

I did not grow up in a religious home. When I accepted Jesus as my savior at 25 years old, I was a blank slate as far as Christianity was concerned. I spent a great deal of time reading the Bible, making up for lost time. As years passed by, I went to Bible college and seminary to deepen my knowledge of the faith. I read many theology books, particularly theology books that relate to the trinity and the person of Christ. The “orthodox” trinity and the two-nature theory of the incarnate Christ were developed by fourth-century Gentile theologians with a background in Greek philosophy. None of this bothered me; I had no reason to question it. But something happened that changed everything – I made a trip to Israel. It is hard for me to fully explain how life-changing this experience was. Jesus was a Jew. He was raised by Jewish parents, went to synagogue, and traveled to Jerusalem for feasts. This was a profound revelation. I now had a reason to question orthodox theology. The theology of the church was created in a different context. The orthodox trinity and two-nature theory are doctrines that were developed in a Greek thought-world. The Jewish context of the Bible was replaced by a very different context, a context that did not value the Jewish faith.

A Bad Foundation

Lost Priority (discarded Jewish monotheism)

The Jewish faith left a clear legacy. It is stamped all over the Hebrew Bible, that is, the Old Testament. The Jewish people believed in one true God, Creator of heaven and earth. This is Jewish monotheism. This is the belief in God that was held by Jesus, the belief in God that was held by his disciples. This is the starting point for New Testament belief and practice. This is the anchor that holds the faith safely in the harbor of biblical thought. The statement “there is one

true God called Father” ends in a period, a hard stop. When the faith migrated into the Gentile world, this belief in God was not held. There was no existing commitment to Jewish monotheism. The early Greek theologians attempted to hold to a form of monotheism when they created a new concept of God – the trinity. There is one God of three persons, but it is not the monotheism of Jesus. The statement “there is one true God called Father” now ends in a comma, followed by “and.” As a result, the anchor that holds all subsequent theological development securely in the harbor of biblical thought was lost. The Christology that followed was adrift in the unsettled sea of philosophy. The church could no longer claim to believe in the God of the Jews, but in the God of the Church Fathers.

A Bad Process

Lost Direction (asked the wrong question)

Having discarded Jewish monotheism, a new question arose in the minds of early-church theologians: Is Jesus fully God? This question is absurd in a Jewish context. Jewish monotheism prevents it. There is one true God, Creator of heavens and earth. He is Jesus’ God, Jesus’ Father. God’s identity was established. There is no other God. But this question is supremely relevant in a Greek context. The question “Is Jesus fully God?” implies that Jesus is God to some degree. But how much? The Greek mind wants to know. This is where the theological wrangling began. Some said he is nearly God, while others said he is fully God. The fully God crowd won out. And the Nicene creed was created. Jesus has a divine nature with all divine attributes. To the early-church theologians, this was a reasonable conclusion. To the Jewish mind, it was not. If discarding Jewish monotheism was bad, then the whole process was bad. The early-church theologians stood at a fork in the road – the path to the left embraced the Jewish God, the path to the right did not. They went to the right and never stopped walking. The end result was a man-made concept of God and a Jesus with two natures, with two minds. The Christian faith lost something precious: God’s self-revelation.

A Bad Result

Lost Common Sense (believed the improbable)

I have an engineering degree. As an engineer, I think and process information in a certain way. I am very practical. I study the way things work. I try to come up with feasible solutions. When it comes to theology, I attempt to apply the same line of thought. The methodology of the early-church theologians made sense to me. But the result was a bit puzzling – a God with three personalities and a person with two minds. I guess you could say that I was “sold” a method, and therefore “bought” the product. But the result nonetheless created a conflict in my practical, goal-oriented mind. As I pondered on this, I devised a test. My wife is a devout Christian who benefited from Christian education up through high school. But she is not trained in theology. How would she respond to “orthodox” Christology? I asked her a straightforward question: “Did you know that Jesus has two minds?” Her response was clear and direct: “That doesn’t make sense. A person does not have two minds.” My wife’s response makes somethings very clear: The result of the orthodox approach does not pass the common-sense test. Now I had a more personal question to address: Why was I convinced that orthodox Christology was correct? The answer is I trusted the process.

A Bad Perspective

Lost Discernment (did not recognize the warning signs)

How did I trust the process? I trusted that the early-church theologians were building on the correct foundation. I trusted that they were asking the right questions. I trusted that they were fighting the good fight. I was convinced by theology books and well-meaning professors that proclaimed that everything was right and proper. I did not realize that the most important thing – Jewish monotheism – was kicked to the curb at the beginning of the process. And once this happened, the process was heading in the wrong direction. The biblical context was lost. The wrong question was being asked. And the result was flawed. The final product defied common sense. Despite the fact that bad results were staring me in the face, I kept believing. I promoted this solution like I was on a mission from God. I lost discernment. I did not recognize the wrong turn at the beginning of the process. The shift in context did not bother me. From my current vantage point, I can see that I did not value the Jewish context of the Bible. I did not value the Jewish faith. I did not value the Jewish heritage, Jesus' heritage. I did not value the primary purpose of the Old Testament – to clearly establish the fact that there is one true God. I did not value what Jesus said about his God.

A Bad Defense

Lost Openness (winning is everything)

When I was in Seminary, I was selected to participate in a public debate. I was to present the trinitarian case, and the other individual was to present the oneness Pentecostal case. I explained the trinity, he explained the oneness God. I critiqued his position, and he critiqued my position. Then we answered questions from the audience. When the debate was over, we shook hands and left the stage. Privately, the other debater said something that stuck with me. He complemented me on my critique of his position. Some of what I said he had not heard before. He then said he needs to readdress some things and develop a better defense of his position. It never occurred to him that I could be right! He was only concerned with how to be better prepared for the next debate. In regard to Christology, I see much of the same thing. Winning the argument is what matters most. The orthodox position has developed many formidable defense strategies throughout the years. There are so many pre-canned answers to draw upon. But what is often overlooked is that there is no defense strategy that will justify a solution that starts in the wrong place, heads in the wrong direction, and ends up at the wrong destination. A good defense of a bad solution is actually a bad defense. It's irrelevant.

A Bad Attitude

Lost Humility (proud to be orthodox)

During my early years as a Christian, I read the Bible and studied church history and theology. The more I learned, the more certain I was that I knew the truth. I understood the orthodox doctrine of the trinity and the two-nature theory of the incarnate Christ, and could explain and defend these doctrines in simple but clear terms. I was proud to be "orthodox." But I did not stay in this place. Time has changed me. I am less dogmatic. In my book, *The Incarnate Christ*, I

present a different Christological solution. My quest begins with Jewish monotheism. Starting here, I embark on a journey to define the person of Christ. I seek to answer the question: How can Jesus fully display God? In the end, I offer what I believe to be a credible and biblically sound one-nature theory of the incarnate Christ. While I hold tightly to the core of my solution, I hold loosely to some of the details. I realize that some of what I claim about Christ may be incorrect; therefore, I reserve the right to change as new insight is revealed. Christology is a very complicated topic. No one has all the answers. My hope is that my solution will encourage others to walk the same path I walked, to correct my missteps, and to provide a clearer picture of Jesus of Nazareth, the Son of God.

I would like to end with a parting thought. The monotheism question is central to Christology. This is something I wish I had known at the beginning of my walk with the Lord. If Jewish monotheism is obsolete/incomplete in the new dispensation, the orthodox two-nature theory is a viable solution. On the other hand, if Jewish monotheism is a truth that carries over into the new dispensation unchanged, the proposed one-nature theory is a viable solution and the orthodox theory is not. The orthodox theologians of the early church gave their answer to the monotheism question – reject Jewish monotheism. I disagree. It is my contention that Jewish monotheism is an eternal truth, and everything Jesus said about himself and everything others said about him must be interpreted in this light. Jewish monotheism is the central message of the Old Testament, and Jesus and Paul unequivocally affirmed its ongoing relevance. At the beginning of the journey, each person needs to answer the following question: Am I going to start with Jesus’ God – the Father – or reject this simple concept of God? The answer to this question determines which Christological solution is possible.

The Incarnate Christ: An Engineer’s Quest to Define the Person of Christ, third edition,
is a free e-book on [Google Books](#) and [Internet Archive](#).